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TAGS: [PREL](#) [XF](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: PDAS SATTERFIELD'S MEETING WITH FM MAMBERTI ON
LEBANON AND MIDDLE EAST ISSUES

REF: VATICAN 0151

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

11. (C) Summary. During a November 15 meeting in Rome, NEA PDAS/Iraq Coordinator Satterfield and Holy See foreign minister Mamberti discussed Lebanon and other Middle Eastern issues. Satterfield and Mamberti agreed on the priority of supporting the democratic process in Lebanon to ensure the election of a representative and independent candidate as president, and also agreed on the undesirability of a "half plus one" approach. Mamberti confirmed that Patriarch Sfeir would not be coming to Rome for the November 24 consistory. On Iraq, Satterfield assured Mamberti of the USG's understanding of the difficulties faced by Christians and other minorities there, and our efforts to help them. Satterfield described plans for the Annapolis peace conference, including the possibility of Syrian participation. Mamberti complained about the Holy See's difficulties in dealing with Israel, whether regarding the bilateral Fundamental Agreement or (more recently) problems faced by Arab religious in obtaining or renewing Israeli visas. Satterfield promised USG attention to this. The two also discussed interreligious dialogue, including the recent letter sent to Christian leaders by 138 Muslim scholars and the visit of Saudi King Abdullah to Pope Benedict XVI. End summary.

12. (C) Ambassador David Satterfield, Iraq Coordinator and Principal Deputy Assistant for Near Eastern Affairs, met November 15 with Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States (i.e. foreign minister) to

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discuss Lebanon and other Middle East matters. Also present were Charge d'affaires and Monsignor Franco Coppola.

Lebanon

13. (C) Satterfield told Mamberti the US is focused intensely on the current situation in Lebanon, which is at a crossroads. The role of Patriarch Sfeir is critical; the US and the Holy See share interests in this essential matter. We recall how painful the events of 1988 and 1989 were for the Patriarch but must focus on the present. Mamberti replied that the Holy See is following events in Lebanon every day. The Holy See fully supports the constitution and the electoral process, and greatly

hopes for a consensus solution. Mamberti noted the public support for Cardinal Sfeir, and for Lebanon, reiterated by Pope Benedict XVI on November 11. Satterfield expressed great respect for the role of the Holy See and of the Pope.

¶4. (C) Satterfield noted USG concerns for the well-being of all Lebanese, and particularly for the Christian community, if the next president is not a credible and authentic leader "for all Lebanese". He said that we support a president who defends an independent Lebanon, but one who is the product of consensus. Satterfield asked about the Patriarch's list of candidates, noting that some of the best candidates would probably, and unfortunately, be vetoed by Nabih Berri, (and those he represents), but he emphasized that it is essential that other good candidates would remain. He emphasized the need for Lebanese candidates, who would not be subject to improper influences or pressures from Syria or Hezbollah. The choice of president should be not be determined solely by Muslim leaders (reflecting a Sunni/Shia deal) but should instead be that of the entire Parliament. If there is no agreement by Hariri and Berri, said Satterfield, we hope that Parliament can express its views and that the Holy See and the Patriarch would support that.

¶5. (C) In response to Mamberti's question, Satterfield clarified that the USG favors instead an outcome reflecting a national consensus, but not at the price of Lebanon's sovereignty. We are concerned about an outcome that would produce "consensus" on a "least common denominator" candidate. The names on the Patriarch's list are therefore of great importance. On a simple (half plus one) majority election, Satterfield said that such an outcome entails risks and was perhaps unachievable by March 14, given difficulties holding all its members together.

¶6. (C) Satterfield asked if the Patriarch would remain in Lebanon, or whether he was planning to visit Rome for the November 24 consistory. He spoke strongly of the need for the Patriarch to be in Lebanon at this crucial time, and urged

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Mamberti to convince him to do so if necessary. Mamberti, surprised, said he could not imagine that the Patriarch would leave Lebanon at this time and confirmed that to his knowledge the Patriarch had no plans to visit Rome; Sfeir, he said, fell into the category of those who are excused from attending this consistory. (Note: Deputy FM Parolin, who spoke to Satterfield after the meeting, also appeared surprised at the idea that Sfeir might be planning to come to Rome. End note)

Iraq

¶7. (C) Noting that he had just visited Iraq, Satterfield said the security situation there is significantly better, but the USG understands clearly the difficulties faced by Iraqi Christians as a defenseless minority. They are not being persecuted per se, but are among the most vulnerable, and are suffering greatly. The USG, with Congress, is examining ways to protect Iraqi Christians. Ambassador Crocker is focused on this. Satterfield offered congratulations to Iraqi Patriarch Delly, who will be elevated to the rank of cardinal at the upcoming consistory. Unfortunately at present the Iraqi political leaders do not have a common vision for the future, which they must develop. The USG does not want to dictate to Iraq, which must shape its own destiny; but we must help to keep it free of polarizing and radicalizing pressures from within and

without.

¶8. (C) Mamberti emphasized that the Church supports an effective (not just nominal) presence of Christians in Iraq and other Mideast countries. "So many have fled!" he lamented. He expressed hope that refugees will return. Satterfield said the USG shares this view and believes the flight is temporary; refugees do want to return, but this will depend on regional stabilization and improvement of Iraq's security and economic situation.

Other issues -- Annapolis, Israel, Inter-religious Dialogue

¶9. (C) Mamberti asked about Annapolis. Satterfield said that while no invitations have been issued, November 26-27 have been set as the tentative dates. Broad participation is envisioned, including at least the G-8, and Arab League Follow-Up Committee members including Lebanon and Syria. The US had told Syrian FM Mouallem ten days ago that "the world is watching you", warning that Syria's behavior would be noted carefully, whether good or bad. Satterfield clarified that the USG is committed to a comprehensive Mideast peace, not just Israel-Palestine.

¶10. (C) Mamberti mentioned the Holy See's relations with Israel, including problems with the bilateral Fundamental Agreement, which has been moving very slowly for years. The next plenary session is scheduled for December in Jerusalem. Typically, said Mamberti, discussion stalls at the level of technical or administrative issues, a sign that the Israelis lack political will to pursue the entire agreement. He described it as a practical problem even for the US church; Christian religious communities have no resources to draw upon in Israel, and depend upon donations from abroad. So Israeli taxes in effect are upon the donations. Satterfield said he would look for ways to help.

¶11. (C) Mamberti continued by lamenting the difficulty Christians have in entering (or re-entering) Israel, especially as visas have become more problematic lately. Religious persons can't get visas, especially those from Arab countries; This means that some religious communities therefore can't send anyone at all. Even individuals bearing Holy See passports can't enter. Mamberti noted that the Holy See understands security issues, but appeared to suggest that this has become a convenient excuse for Israel. Satterfield promised to engage, and asked for specific examples.

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¶12. (C) On interreligious dialogue, Mamberti said in general there is growing awareness of the importance of dialogue to avoid a "clash of civilizations". The recent letter from 138 Muslim leaders (see reftel for details) is an encouraging sign, said Mamberti, as was the visit of Saudi King Abdullah; we have hope. Unfortunately the West is too often seen in Muslim countries as equivalent to "Christian", with unpleasant associations of crusades, etc. Abdullah's visit was planned for last year but postponed; both the Holy See and the King were pleased at the visit. The King had a long meeting with the Pope, followed by a meeting with Cardinal Bertone (the Secretary of State, second to the Pope) and Mamberti himself. Unfortunately the substance was only general - talk of dialogue, cooperation, and peace. The Holy See pointed to the positive

role of Christians in Saudi Arabia, but didn't go into details. There was no discussion of religious freedom.

¶13. (C) Satterfield noted that the USG is concerned about the archaic perspective of many in the Sunni Arab world, notably but not exclusively the Saudis, who tend to view Middle East issues in manichean terms -- e.g., Sunni/Shia, Arab/Persian, and who refer to Iraqi Shi'a as "Safavids" The US has urged the Saudis to adopt a more modern and less polarizing perspective.

¶14. (U) Satterfield has cleared this message.
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